

## FIVE LITTLE PEPPERS; AND HOW THEY GREW.

BY MARGARET SIDNEY.

## CHAPTER XX.

## POLLY IS COMFORTED.

**Y**ES, it must be confessed. Polly was homesick. All her imaginations of her mother's hard work, increased by her absence, loomed up before her, till she was almost ready to fly home without a minute's warning. At night, when no one knew it, the tears would come racing over the poor, forlorn little face, and would *not* be squeezed back. It got to be noticed finally; and one and all redoubled their exertions to make everything twice as pleasant as ever!

The only place, except in front of the grand piano, where Polly approached a state of comparative happiness, was in front of the greenhouse.

Here she would stay, comforted and soothed among the lovely plants and rich exotics, rejoicing the heart of Old James the gardener, who since Polly's first rapturous entrance had taken her into his good graces for all time.

Every chance she could steal after practice hours were over, and after the clamorous demands of the boys upon her time were fully satisfied, was seized to fly on the wings of the wind, to the flowers.

But even with the music and flowers the dancing light in the eyes went down a little; and Polly, growing more silent and pale, moved around with a little droop to the small figure that had only been wont to fly through the wide halls and spacious rooms with gay and springing step.

"Polly don't like us," at last said Van one day in despair.

"Then, dear," said Mrs. Whitney, "you must be kinder to her than ever; think what it would be for one of you to be away from home even among friends."

"I'd like it first rate to be away from Percy," said Van, reflectively; "I wouldn't come back in three, no, six weeks."

"My son," said his mamma, "just stop and think how badly you would feel, if you really couldn't see Percy."

"Well," said Van, and he showed signs of relenting a little at that; "but Percy is perfectly awful, mamma, you don't know; and he feels so smart too," he added vindictively.

"Well," said Mrs. Whitney, softly, "let's think what we can do for Polly; it makes me feel very badly to see her sad little face."

"I don't know," said Van, running over in his mind all the possible ways he could think of for entertaining anybody, "unless she'd like my new book of travels — or my velocipede," he added.

"I'm afraid those wouldn't quite answer the purpose," said his mamma, smiling — "especially the last; yet we must think of something."

But just here Mr. King thought it about time to take matters into *his* hands. So, with a great many chucklings and shruggings when no one was by, he had departed after breakfast one day, simply saying he shouldn't be back to lunch.

Polly sat in the drawing-room, near the edge of the twilight, practising away bravely. Somehow, of all the days when the home feeling was the strongest, this day it seemed as if she could bear it no longer. If she could only see Phronsie for just one moment! "I shall *have* to give up!" she moaned. "I *can't* stand it!" and over went her head on the music rack.

"Where is she?" said a voice over in front of the piano, in the gathering dusk — unmistakably Mr. King's.

"Oh, she's always at the piano," said Van's. "She must be there now, somewhere," and then somebody giggled. Then came in the loudest of whispers from little Dick, "Oh, Jappy, what'll she say?"

"*Hush!*" said one of the other boys; "do be still, Dick!"

Polly bounced up straight, and whisked off the tears quickly. Up came Mr. King with an enormous bundle in his arms; and he marched up to the piano, puffing with his exertions.

"Here, Polly, hold your lap," he had only strength to gasp. And then he broke out into a loud burst of

merriment, in which all the troop joined, until the big room echoed with the sound.

At this, the bundle opened suddenly, and — out popped Phronsie!

"Here I am! I'm here, Polly!"

But Polly couldn't speak; and if Jasper hadn't caught her just in time, she would have tumbled over backward from the stool, Phronsie and all!

"Aren't you glad I've come, Polly?" asked Phronsie, with her little face close to Polly's own.

That brought Polly to. "Oh, *Phronsie!*" she cried, and strained her to her heart; while the boys crowded around, and plied her with sudden questions.

"Now you'll stay," cried Van; "say, Polly, won't you?"



"AREN'T YOU GLAD I'VE COME, POLLY?"

"Weren't you awfully surprised?" cried Percy; "say, Polly, *awfully*?"

"Is her name Phronsie," put in Dick, unwilling to be left out, and not thinking of anything else to ask.

"Boys," whispered their mother, warningly, "she can't answer you; just look at her face."

And to be sure, our Polly's face was a study to behold. All its old sunniness was as nothing to the joy that now transfigured it.

"Oh!" she cried, coming out of her rapture a little, and springing over to Mr. King with Phronsie still in her arms. "Oh, you are the dearest and best Mr. King I ever saw! but how did you make mammy let her come?"

"Isn't he splendid!" cried Jasper in intense pride, swelling up. "Father knew how to do it."

But Polly's arms were around the old gentleman's neck, so she didn't hear. "There, there," he said soothingly, patting her brown, fuzzy head. Some-

thing was going down the old gentleman's neck, that wet his collar, and made him whisper very tenderly in her ear, "don't give way now, Polly; Phronsie'll see you."

"I know," gasped Polly, gulping down her sobs; "I won't—only—I *can't* thank you!"

"Phronsie," said Jasper quickly, "what do you suppose Prince said the other day?"

"What?" asked Phronsie in intense interest slipping down out of Polly's arms, and crowding up close to Jasper's side. "What did he, Japser?"

"Oh-ho, how funny!" laughed Van, while little Dick burst right out, "Japser!"

"Be still," said Jappy warningly, while Phronsie stood surveying them all with grave eyes.

"Well, I asked him, 'Don't you want to see Phronsie Pepper, Prince?' And do you know, he just stood right upon his hind legs, Phronsie, and said: 'Bark! yes, Bark! Bark!'"

"Did he *really*, Japser?" cried Phronsie, delighted beyond measure; and clasping her hands in rapture, "all alone by himself?"

"Yes, all alone by himself," asserted Jasper, vehemently, and winking furiously to the others to stop their laughing; "he did now, truly, Phronsie."

"Then mustn't I go and see him *now*, Japser? yes, pretty soon *now*?"

"So you must," cried Jasper, enchanted at his success in amusing, "and I'll go with you."

"Oh, no," cried Phronsie, shaking her yellow head. "Oh no, Japser; I must go by my very own self."

"There Jap, you've caught it," laughed Percy; while the others screamed at the sight of Jasper's face.

"Oh Phronsie!" cried Polly, turning around at the last words; "how *could* you!"

"Don't mind it, Polly," whispered Jasper; "twasn't her fault."

"Phronsie," said Mrs. Whitney, smilingly, stooping over the child, "would you like to see a little pussy I've got for you?"

But the chubby face didn't look up brightly, as usual: and the next moment, without a bit of warning, Phronsie sprang past them all, even Polly, and flung herself into Mr. King's arms, in a perfect torrent of sobs. "Oh! let's *go back!*" was all they heard!

"Mercy!" ejaculated the old gentleman, in the utmost amazement; "and such a time as I've had to get her here too!" he added, staring around on the

astonished group, none of whom had a word to say.

But Polly stood like a statue! All Jasper's frantic efforts at comfort, utterly failed. To think that Phronsie had left her for *any* one!—even good Mr. King! The room seemed to busy, and everything to turn upside down—and just then, she heard another cry—"Oh, I *want* Polly, I *do!*"

With one jump, Polly was at Mr. King's side, with her face on his coat, close to the little tear-stained one. The fat, little arms unclasped their hold, and transferred themselves willingly to Polly's neck; and Phronsie hugged up comfortingly to Polly's heart, who poured into her ear all the loving words she had so longed to say.

Just then there was a great rush and a scuffling noise; and something bounced up to Phronsie. "Oh!" And then the next minute, she had her arms around Prince's neck, too, who was jumping all over her and trying as hard as he could, to express his overwhelming delight.

"She's the cunningest little thing I ever saw," said Mrs. Whitney, enthusiastically, afterward, aside to Mr. King. "Such lovely yellow hair, and such exquisite brown eyes—the combination is very striking. How did her mother ever let her go?" she asked impulsively, "I didn't believe you *could* persuade her, father."

"I didn't have any fears, if I worked it rightly," said the old gentleman complacently. "I wasn't coming without her, Marian, if it could possibly be managed. The truth is, that Phronsie had been pinning for Polly to such an extent, that there was no other way but for her to *have* Polly; and her mother was just on the point, although it almost killed her, of sending for Polly—as if we should have let her go!" he cried in high dudgeon; just as if he owned the whole of the Peppers, and could dispose of them all to suit his fancy! "So you see, I was just in time; in the very nick of time, in fact!"

"So her mother was willing?" asked his daughter, curiously.

"Oh, she couldn't help it," cried Mr. Ring, beginning to walk up and down the floor, and beaming as he recalled his successful strategy; "there wasn't the smallest use in thinking of anything else. I told her 'twould just stop Polly from ever being a musician if she broke off now—and so 'twould, you know yourself, Marian, for we should never get the child here again, if we let her go now; and I talked—well, I had to talk *some*; but, well—the upshot is,

I *did* get her, and I *did* bring her — and here she is!" And the old gentleman was so delighted with his success, that he had to burst out into a series of short, happy bits of laughter, that occupied quite a space of time. At last he came out of them, and wiped his face vigorously.

"And to think how fond the little girl is of you, father!" said Mrs. Whitney, who hadn't yet gotten over her extreme surprise at the old gentleman's complete subjection to the little Peppers: he, whom all children had by instinct always approached so carefully! and whom every one found it necessary to conciliate!

"Well, she's a nice child," he said, "a *very* nice child; and," straightening himself up to his fullest height, and looking so very handsome, that his daughter could not conceal her admiration, "I shall always take care of Phronsie Pepper, Marian!"

"So I hope," said Mrs. Whitney; "and father, I do believe they'll repay you; for I do think there's good blood there; these children have a look about them that shows them worthy to be trusted."

"So they have: so they have," assented Mr. Ring, and then the conversation dropped.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### PHRONSIE.



PHRONSIE was toiling up and down the long, oak stair-case the next morning; slowly going from one step to the other, drawing each little fat foot into place laboriously, but with a pleased expression on her face that only gave some small idea of the rapture within. Up and down she had been going for a long time, perfectly fascinated; seeming to care for nothing else in the world but to work her way up to the top of the long flight, only to turn and come down again. She had been going on so for some time, till at last, Polly, who was afraid she would tire herself all out, sat down at the foot and begged and implored the little girl, who was nearly to the top, to stop and rest.

"You'll be tired to death, Phronsie!" she said, looking up at the small figure on its toilsome journey.

"Why you must have gone up a million times! Do sit down, pet; we're all going out riding, Phronsie, this afternoon; and you can't go if you're all tired out."

"I won't be tired, Polly," said Phronsie, turning around and looking at her, "do let me go just once more!"

"Well," said Polly, who never could refuse her anything, "just once, Phronsie, and then you *must* stop."

So Phronsie kept on her way rejoicing, while Polly still sat on the lowest stair, and drummed impatiently on the stair above her, waiting for her to get through.

Jappy came through the hall and found them thus.

"Halloo, Polly!" he said, stopping suddenly; "what's the matter?"

"Oh, Phronsie's been a-goin' so," said Polly, looking up at the little figure above them, which had nearly reached the top in delight, "that I can't stop her. She has really, Jappy, almost all the morning; you can't think how crazy she is over it."

"Is that so?" said Jasper, with a little laugh. "Hulloa, Phronsie, is it nice?" and he tossed a kiss to the little girl, and then sat down by Polly.

"Oh," said Phronsie, turning to come down, "it's the be-yew-tiflest place I ever saw, Japser! the very be-yew-tiflest!"

"I wish she could have her picture painted," whispered Jasper, enthusiastically. "Look at her now, Polly, quick!"

"Yes," said Polly, "ain't she sweet!"

"Sweet!" said Jasper, "I should think she *was!*"

"The sunlight through an oriel window fell on the childish face and figure, glinting the yellow hair, and lighting up the radiant face, that yet had a tender, loving glance for the two who waited for her below. One little foot was poised, just in the act of stepping down to the next lower stair, and the fat hand grasped the polished railing, expressive of just enough caution to make it truly childish. In after years Jasper never thought of Phronsie without bringing up this picture on that April morning, when Polly and he sat at the foot of the stairs, and looked up and saw it.

"Where's Jap?" called one of the boys; and then there was a clatter out into the hall.

"What are you doing?" and Van came to a full stop of amazement and stared at them.

"Resting," said Jappy, concisely, "what do you want, Van?"

"I want you," said Van, "we can't do anything

without you, Jappy ; you know that."

"Very well," said Jasper, getting up. "Come on, Polly, we must go."

"And Phronsie," said Van, anxiously, looking up to Phronsie, who had nearly reached them by this time, "we want her, too."

"Of course," said Polly, running up and meeting her to give her a hug ; "I don't go unless she does."

"Where are we going, Polly ?" asked Phronsie, looking back longingly to her beloved stairs as she was borne off.

"To the greenhouse, chick !" said Jasper, "to help Turner ; and it'll be good fun, won't it, Polly ?"

"What is a greenhouse ?" asked the child, wonderingly. "All green, Japsar ?"

"Oh, dear me," said Van, doubling up, "do you suppose she thinks it's painted green ?"

"It's green inside, Phronsie, dear," said Jasper, kindly, "and that's the best of all."

When Phronsie was really let loose in the greenhouse she thought it decidedly best of all ! and she went into nearly as much of a rapture as Polly did on her first visit to it.

In a few moments she was cooing and jumping among the plants, while old Turner, staid and particular as he was, laughed to see her go.

"She's your sister, Miss Mary, ain't she ?" at last he asked, as Phronsie bent lovingly over a little pot of heath, and just touched one little leaf carefully with her finger.

"Yes," said Polly, "but she don't look like me."

"She *is* like you," said Turner, respectfully, "if she don't look like you ; and the flowers know it, too," he added, "and they'll love to see her coming, just as they do you."

For Polly had won the old gardener's heart completely by her passionate love for flowers, and nearly every morning a little nosegay, fresh and beautiful, came up to the house for "Miss Mary."

And now nobody liked to think of the time, or to look back to it, when Phronsie hadn't been in the house. When the little feet went patterning through through halls and over stairs, it seemed to bring sunshine and happiness into every one's heart just to hear the sounds. Polly and the boys in the school-room would look up from their books and nod away brightly to each other, and then fall to faster than ever on their lessons, to get through the quicker to be with her again.

One thing Phronsie always insisted on, and kept to

it pertinaciously — and that was to go into the drawing-room with Polly when she went to practice, and there, with one of her numerous family of dolls, to sit down quietly in some corner and wait till she got through.

Day after day she did it, until Polly, who was worried to think how tedious it must be for her, would look around and say —

"Oh, childie, do run out and play."

"I want to stay," Phronsie would beg in an injured tone ; "please let me, Polly."

So Polly would jump and give her a kiss, and then, delighted to know that she was there, would go at her practising with twice the vigor and enthusiasm.

But Phronsie's chief occupation, at least when she wasn't with Polly, was the entertainment and amusement of Mr. King. And never was she very long absent from his side, which so pleased the old gentleman that he could scarcely contain himself, as with a gravity befitting the importance of her office, she would follow him around in a happy contented way, that took with him immensely. And now-a-days, no one ever saw the old gentleman going out of a morning, when Jasper was busy with his lessons, without Phronsie by his side, and many people turned to see the portly figure with the handsome head bent to catch the prattle of a little sunny-haired child, who trotted along, clasping his hand confidingly. And nearly all of them turned to gaze the second time before they could convince themselves that it was really that queer, stiff old Mr. King of whom they had heard so much.

And now the accumulation of dolls in the house became something alarming, for Mr. King, observing Phronsie's devotion to her family, thought there couldn't possibly be too many of them ; so he scarcely ever went out without bringing home one at least to add to them, until Phronsie had such a remarkable collection as would have driven almost any other child nearly crazy with delight. She, however, regarded them something in the light of a grave responsibility, to be taken care of tenderly, to be watched over carefully as to just the right kind of bringing up ; and to have small morals and manners taught in just the right way.

Phronsie was playing in the corner of Mrs. Whitney's little boudoir, engaged in sending out invitations for an elaborate tea-party to be given by one of the dolls, when Polly rushed in with consternation in her tones, and dismay written all over her face.

"What is it, dear?" asked Mrs. Whitney, looking up from her embroidery.

"Why," said Polly, "how *could* I! I don't see—but I've forgotten to write to mamsie to-day; it's Wednesday, you know, and there's Monsieur coming." And poor Polly looked out in despair to see the lively little music teacher advancing towards the house at an alarming rate of speed.

"That is because you were helping Van so long last evening over his lessons," said Mrs. Whitney; "I am so sorry."

"Oh, no," cried Polly honestly, "I had plenty of time—but I forgot 'twas mamsie's day. What *will* she do!"

"You will have to let it go now till the afternoon, dear; there's no other way; it can go in the early morning mail."

"Oh, dear," sighed Polly, "I suppose I must." And she went down to meet Monsieur with a very distressed little heart.

Phronsie laid down the note of invitation she was scribbling, and stopped to think; and a moment or two after, at a summons from a caller, Mrs. Whitney left the room.

"I know I ought to," said Phronsie to herself and the dolls, "yes, I know I had; mamsie will feel, oh! so bad, when she don't get Polly's letter; and I know the way, I do, truly."

She got up and went to the window, where she thought a minute; and then, coming back, she took up her little stubby pencil, and bending over a small bit of paper, she commenced to trace with laborious efforts and much hard breathing, some very queer hieroglyphics that to her seemed to be admirable, as at last she held them up with great satisfaction.

"Good bye," she said then, getting up and bowing to the dolls who sat among the interrupted invitations, "I won't be gone but a little bit of one minute," and she went out determinedly and shut the door.

Nobody saw the little figure going down the carriage drive, so of course nobody could stop her. When Phronsie got to the gate-way she looked up and down the street carefully, either way.

"Yes," she said, at last, "it was down here, I'm *very* sure, I went with grandpa," and immediately turned down the wrong way, and went on and on, grasping carefully her small, and by this time rather soiled bit of paper.

At last she reached the business streets; and although she didn't come to the Post Office, she com-

forted herself by the thought—"it must be coming soon. I guess it's round this corner."

She kept turning corner after corner, until, at last, a little anxious feeling began to tug at her heart; and she began to think—"I wish I *could* see Polly"—

And now, she had all she could do to get out of the way of the crowds of people who were pouring up and down the thoroughfare. Everybody jostled against her, and gave her a push. "Oh dear!" thought Phronsie, "there's *such* a many big people!" and then there was no time for anything else but to stumble in and out, to keep from being crushed completely beneath their feet. At last, an old huckster woman, in passing along, knocked off her bonnet with the end of her big basket, which flew around and struck Phronsie's head. Not stopping to look into the piteous brown eyes, she strode on without a word. Phronsie turned in perfect despair to go down a street that looked as if there might be room enough for her in it. Thoroughly frightened, she plunged over the crossing, to reach it!

"Look out!" cried a ringing voice. "Stop!"

"The little girl'll be killed!" said others with bated breath, as a powerful pair of horses whose driver could not pull them up in time, dashed along just in front of her! With one cry, Phronsie sprang between their feet, and reached the opposite curb-stone in safety!

The plunge brought her up against a knot of gentlemen who were standing talking on the corner.

"What's this!" asked one, whose back being next to the street, hadn't seen the commotion, as the small object dashed into their midst, and fell up against him.

"Didn't you see that narrow escape?" asked a second, whose face had paled in witnessing it. "This little girl was nearly killed a moment ago—careless driving enough!" And he put out his hand to catch the child.

"Bless me!" cried a third, whirling around suddenly, "Bless me! you don't say so! why"—

With a small cry, but gladsome and distinct in its utterance, Phronsie gave one look—"Oh, *grandpa!*" was all she could say.

"Oh! *where*!"—Mr. King couldn't possibly have uttered another word, for then his breath gave out entirely, as he caught the small figure.

"I went to the Post Office," said the child, clinging to him in delight, her tangled hair waving over

the little white face, into which a faint pink color was quickly coming back. "Only it wouldn't come; and I walked and walked—where is it, grandpa?" And Phronsie gazed up anxiously into the old gentleman's face.

"*She went to the Post Office!*" turning around on the others fiercely, as if they had contradicted him—"Why, my child, what were you going to do?"



"TWAS A NAUGHTY HORSE!"

"Mamsie's letter," said Phronsie, holding up for inspection the precious bit, which by this time, was decidedly forlorn—"Polly couldn't write; and Mamsie'd feel *so* bad not to get one—she would really" said the child, shaking her head very soberly, "for Polly said so."

"And you've been—oh! I can't *think* of it," said Mr. King, tenderly taking her up on his shoul-

der, "well, we must get home now, or I don't know *what* Polly will do!" And without stopping to say a word to his friends, he hailed a passing carriage, and putting Phronsie in, he commanded the driver to get them as quickly as possible to their destination.

In a few moments they were home. Mr. King pushed into the house with his burden. "Don't any body know," he burst out, puffing up the stairs, and scolding furiously at every step, "enough to take better care of this child, than to have such goings on!"

"What is the matter, father?" asked Mrs. Whitney, coming up the stairs, after him. "What has happened out of the way?"

"*Out of the way!*" roared the old gentleman, irascibly, "well, if you want Phronsie racing off to to the Post Office by herself, and nearly getting killed, poor child! yes, Marian, I say nearly killed!" he continued.

"What *do* you mean?" gasped Mrs. Whitney.

"Why, where have you been?" asked the old gentleman, who wouldn't let Phronsie get down out of his arms, under any circumstances; so there she lay, poking up her head like a little bird, and trying to say she wasn't in the least hurt, "where's everybody been not to know she'd gone?" he exclaimed, "where's Polly—and Jasper—and all of 'em?"

"Polly's taking her music lesson," said Mrs. Whitney. "Oh, Phronsie darling!" and she bent over the child in her father's arms, and nearly smothered her with kisses.

"'Twas a naughty horse," said Phronsie, sitting up straight and looking at her, "or I should have found the Post Office; and I lost off my bonnet, too," she added, for the first time realizing her loss, putting her hand to her head; "a bad old woman knocked it off with a basket—and now mamsie won't get her letter!" and she waved the bit, which she still grasped firmly between her thumb and finger, sadly towards Mrs. Whitney.

"Oh, dear," groaned that lady, "how could we talk before her! But who would have thought it! Darling," and she took the little girl from her father's arms, who at last let her go, "don't think of your mamma's letter; we'll tell her how it was," and she sat down in the first chair that she could reach; while Phronsie put her tumbled little head down on the kind shoulder and gave a weary little sigh.

"It was *so* long," she said, "and my shoes hurt," and she stuck out the dusty little boots, that spoke

pathetically of the long and unaccustomed tramp.

"Poor little lamb!" said Mr. King, getting down to unbutton them. "What a shame!" he mumbled, pulling off half of the buttons in his frantic endeavors to get them off quickly.

But Phronsie never heard the last of his objurgations, for in a minute she was fast asleep! The tangled hair fell off from the tired little face; the breathing came peaceful and regular, and with her little hand fast clasped in Mrs. Whitney's she slept on and on.

Polly came flying up stairs, two or three at a time, and humming a scrap of her last piece that she had just conquered.

"Phronsie," she called, with a merry little laugh, "where"—

"Hush!" said Mr. King, warningly, and then just because he couldn't explain there without waking Phronsie up, he took hold of Polly's two shoulders and marched her into the next room, where he carefully closed the door, and told her the whole thing, using his own discretion about the very narrow escape she had passed through. He told enough, however, for Polly to see what had been so near them; and she stood there so quietly, alternately paling and flushing as he proceeded, till at last, when he finished, Mr. King was frightened almost to death at the sight of her face.

"Oh, goodness me, Polly!" he said, striding up to her, and then fumbling around on the table to find a glass of water, "you are not going to faint, are you? Phronsie's all well now, she isn't hurt in the least, I assure you; I assure you—where *is* a glass of water! Marian ought to see that there's some here—that stupid Jane!" and in utter bewilderment he was fussing here and there, knocking down so many things in general, that the noise soon brought Polly to, with a little gasp.

"Oh, don't mind me, dear Mr. King—I'm—all well."

"So you are," said the old gentleman, setting up a toilet bottle that he had knocked over, "so you are; I didn't think you'd go and tumble over, Polly, I really didn't," and he beamed admiringly down on her.

And then Polly crept away to Mrs. Whitney's side where she flung herself down on the floor, to watch the little sleeping figure. Her hand was gathered up,

into the kind one that held Phronsie's; and there they watched and watched and waited.

"Oh, dear," said Phronsie, suddenly, turning over with a little sigh, and bobbing up her head to look at Polly; "I'm so hungry! I haven't had anything to eat in ever an' ever so long, Polly!" and she gazed at her with a very injured countenance.

"So you must be," said Mrs. Whitney, kissing the flushed little face. "Polly must ring the bell for Jane to bring this little bird some crumbs."

"Can I have a great many?" asked Phronsie, lifting her eyes, with the dewy look of sleep still lingering in them, "as many as *two* birdies?"

"Yes, dear," said Mrs. Whitney, laughing; "I think as many as *three* little birdies could eat, Phronsie."

"Oh," said Phronsie, and leaned back satisfied, while Polly gave the order, which was presently followed by Jane with a well-filled tray.

"Now," said Jappy, when he heard the account of the adventure, "I say that letter ought to go to your mother, Polly."

"Oh," said Polly, "it would scare mamsie most to death, Jappy!"

"Don't tell her the whole," said Jasper, quickly, "I didn't mean that—about the horses and all that—but only enough to let her see how Phronsie tried to get it to her."

"And I'm going to write to your brother Joel," said Van, drawing up to the library table; "I'll scare *him*, Polly, I guess; he won't tell your mother."

"Your crow-tracks'! I scare him enough without anything else," said Percy, pleasantly, who really could write very nicely, while Polly broke out in an agony:

"Oh, no, Van, you mustn't! you mustn't!"

"If Van does," said Jasper, decidedly, "it'll be the last time he'll write to the 'brown house,' I can tell him; and besides, he'll go to Coventry." This had the desired effect.

"Let's all write," said Polly.

So a space on the table was cleared, and the children gathered around it, when there was great scratching of pens, and clearing of ideas; which presently resulted in a respectable budget of letters, into which Phronsie's was lovingly tucked in the centre; and then they all filed out to put it into the letter-box in the hall, for Thomas to mail with the rest in the morning.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)